L: Herskovits E-4, 6 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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Simple annual rites are held for the gods in January, each family giving small offerings in its house of worship to its own deities. These minor ceremonies are not to be confused with the extended rituals which a family may perform but once in a decade or a generation. Because of the extensive preparation and large outlay these entail, such rites are often postponed from year to year. According to some, this postponement is sought through an *action de grâce*, based on Church ritual, while others maintain that it is but necessary on his special day to appeal to the deity who is troubling the family, give a small offering — a *mangé sec* — and ask for the desired respite. This may be done several times, until crop failures, sudden deaths, and the loss of valuable property begin to afflict the family, whereupon the family head seeks out a *hungan*, who by divination determines the supernatural forces that are responsible for these misfortunes; and when his statement that the gods have reached the end of their patience is confirmed independently by several other priests who are consulted, active preparations for the major rite are finally set in motion.

Any such important ceremony must be held on the ancestral habitation, and centers in the *maison de servitude*, the family house of service for the gods. The house itself, to be differentiated from the *humfort*, or "temple" of the *vodun* priest, may be elaborate or simple in accordance with the status of family members in the *vodun* cult.[3] At one end of the sacred house is a platform about two and one half feet high on which are placed calabash plates for the *loa*, six for the Créole deities, three for the Mystères Guinée, and a white plate with a "thunder stone," or Neolithic celt, and a necklace for Damballa. Not all *cailles mystères* are painted, but some, it is said, are green "for hope," and some red "for victory," while one was said to have designs of flowers and snakes painted on the wall above the platform.[4] These houses usually have two rectangular rooms, each with a separate entrance and each having its platform at the narrow end facing the doorway. One of

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based on the rituals that were observed. In every case at least two major officiants are necessary, the *prêt' savanne* and the *hungan*, though the role of the latter is the all-important one. Last-minute preparations are made during the final morning, but what is needed will have been accumulated over a period of many months. Tables to hold offerings — sometimes two, sometimes more — are arranged at the sacred places on the family habitation, usually near streams or great trees where the gods reside. Eggs, cereals, drinks, and cornmeal — the food of the gods — are brought, and the animals to be sacrificed are tethered near by. Early in the afternoon the family, dressed in white, assemble, while the *vodun* priest with cornmeal describes on the ground the cabalistic designs called *vever*, and he sees to it that all has its proper place on the altar, whether it be the ever-present crucifix, or the chromolithographs of the saints, or the bottles of "drink" — usually non-alcoholic — or cereals and flour of various kinds. Consecrated water must be on hand, particularly at the big "altar," as the table covered by a canopy to protect the sacred objects is called.

The first part of the ceremony is an *action de grâce*, which in Mirebalais requires an hour or more, but which is said to last two or three hours in southern Haiti. This ritual, entirely derived from the litany of the Church, must always precede any *vodun* ceremony of the kind being considered here. Its purpose is said "to set the *loa* in movement" and to notify them of the rites that are to come, but psychologically it also serves to assure the participants that they are not proceeding to the worship of African gods without having paid friendly homage to God, the ruler of the universe, and the saints. The songs and prayers are brought to a close by an *adoration*, when offerings of money are made by members of the family to pay the officiant. At this point the songs change to a more African rhythm, and the *vodun* priest takes active charge.

As darkness falls, on the first day of the rite, he summons the

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nals were being performed. If they failed to wave their banners vigorously or often enough, the one in charge chided them for their lack of zeal, whereupon their movements would become a kind of dance. During the *adoration* each member of the family was called upon to give coins or candles, the first for the *prêt' savanne*, though this was not his entire fee.

With the benediction, the *action de grâce* came to an end, and the solemn, tired voice of the *prêt' savanne* was heard intoning a hymn, which, in the usual fashion, was repeated by the assembled group until, without interlude, without even a pause, the interpolations of the chorus gradually changed, so that the rhythm became African, and, with the transition, the *vodun* priest took over the leadership. The *hungan* began by repeating several times the phrase which throughout the entire ceremony was to punctuate all its climaxes, "*Grâce* [*et*] *mise'corde*," and the family murmured it in response. He then ordered each member of the family to address himself to the *loa*, telling what troubles had befallen him and what favors he desired. An assistant now took six candles from the *trône*. Proceeding in a counter-clockwise direction, he described a large circle about that part of the meadow where the ceremony was to take place, fixing a candle in the ground at intervals. Four of these were for the four corners of the earth, one was for Mait' 'Bitation — the deity termed Master of the Habitation — and one for the Mait' Source — the Master of the Stream. When the members of the family, each holding a lighted candle, had formed in a line, they were bidden to place these candles in the earth within the area described by the six already there, and as they scattered over the sacred ground, little flickering flames dotted the hillside and the grassy meadow behind the *trône* in the deepening dusk.

Then all returned to the altar, and the *hungan*, taking the first of three plates made ready for him, began to describe *vevers*. One plate held white cornmeal flour, one was filled with gray ashes, called Guinea flour, and the third contained

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78 a black powder of ground, roasted coffee beans. Starting at the
793 tree near the "first" table for Bosu, he traced a white line
796 that, passing the second table and the trees for Simbi, con-
532 tinued to the *trône,* to which subsidiary motifs were then added in gray and black, making of the designs an intricate geometric composition.

78 With bell in hand and a small whistle in his mouth, both of
79 which later were entrusted to his assistants, the *hungan* went
[533] about, blowing the whistle at intervals to call the *loa.* Singing, he directed that a wooden boat-shaped basin containing water be placed in front and a little to the left of the *trône* for washing the feet of the sacrificial animals. Though all the family were present, they were again ritually summoned in song to come with the sacrifices and were ordered to stand near by with lighted candles while the animals were bathed. As they gathered, the *hungan* became possessed by Simbi, who took it upon himself to set the fee for conducting this ceremony at 117.10 gourdes. When he announced this sum, loud pleas of poverty were heard from the family, while speaking through the priest, the god bargained with them until the sum of 110 gourdes was finally agreed upon.

[533] The *hungan* now sang a long invocation, inviting the gods of all those places where Africans live to come. First the feet of the fowl were washed, then those of the pigs, and finally of the goat. Each fowl was passed over the body and head of every
[822] member of the family as it was presented with the requisite song to the proper *loa* — the red and black cock for Legba, the black fowl for Gede, the red one for Ogun, the white for Damballa, and the fowl with ruffled plumage for Congo Zandor. Then each was placed on the ground in front of three small piles of food taken from the *trône.* They were watched with anxiety by all present, for the pecking at the food is a signal that the god accepts the animal given him. The small pigs for Ti Kita Demembré, and the boar for Bosu, were offered the same food as the fowls; the goat for Erzilie Gé Rouge was pre-

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spot somewhat farther down the stream than the site of the earlier ceremony, and later at the family habitation on the hill. There was one table arranged as a *trône* and under its canopy, beside the *images*, the candles, and the crucifix, were white foods such as rice and white beans. Instead of Pétro *loa*, this time the ceremony was to bring Rada gods who were to be asked for children, good health, and good fortune. The *trône* was just below the confluence of two brooks, near some great palm trees. Near by was a weir, while in the larger stream, below the point of juncture, were two small natural pools.

When the *action de grâce*, which did not differ from that witnessed earlier, was ended, the *hungan* again made his *verver*, and these were yet richer in design than on the previous occasion. As he finished he took a number of the women of the family by the right hand, spinning each in turn several times to induce possession. The *loa* Damballa Siligwe "came" almost at once, possessing a woman who threw herself into the stream, threshing about as a "serpent." No one troubled himself to attend to her, however, as she emerged and walked about in her wet clothes behind the *trône* and in front of it, so that, according to the *hungan*, the *loa* became angry and would not come, thus making it necessary to sing many more songs of praise and entreaty. As he sang, the *hungan* seized one member of the family after another by the hand, spinning them about and making them kneel before the *trône* to bring the *loa*.

Moin dit Gran',	I say, Gran',
Bonjou', Gran',	Good-day, Gran',
Bonjou', bonjou'.	Good-day, good-day.
Enfants, la yo, Gran',	It is their children, Gran',
Qui ap mandé coumen nous ye-e,	Who ask how you are,
Enfants yo	Their children
Qui ap dit bonjou'.	Who say good-day.

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Once again the *hungan* made *verver* and, as he did so, the woman possessed by Damballa, leaping across the brook, climbed into a calabash tree, holding to the near-by palm fronds for support as she shook the tree to punctuate her shouted directions and demands. As she climbed higher and higher, the *hungan* pleaded: "Go no further, Papa. Climb no further," but to no avail. By this time it was after four o'clock, and since this day the rains did not delay, the *hungan* entreated her to descend from the tree, to permit him and the others assembled there to go up the hill out of the downpour. Wooing the "*loa*" with song, he urged:

Verver ci mè' a tè,	Here is *verver* on the ground,
Pinga cé'émonie moin,	Take heed of my ceremony,
Shango, ago-e!	Shango, *ago-e!*

While he sang, he made *verver* about the base of the tree on which the woman was standing and along the bank of the stream. But he still had no success, for she persisted with much violence to recount the wrong that had been done by the family to provoke the anger of the gods—how one member had bargained with a *hungan* to induce him to send evil *loa* to the other members of the family, that they might die and his inheritance might be the greater. Before she would consent to descend, all the sacrifices had to be brought for her inspection, and all those possessed were required to go up the hill and dress in clean clothes. Returning in the rain, the freshly dressed women gathered about the base of the tree, exhibiting the sacrificial animals to the *loa*, the chickens held high in the hands of their donors, and the goats and sheep prominently placed. Slowly, very slowly, as the downpour continued, the woman began to descend, and many times she hesitated, so that it was more than ten minutes before she reached the ground.

But even after she was on the ground and the *hungan* was

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ABOVE, *A* vodun *altar: both Catholic and African religious symbols are to be seen.*
BELOW, *Mystical designs traced in cornmeal on the ground about a shrine.*

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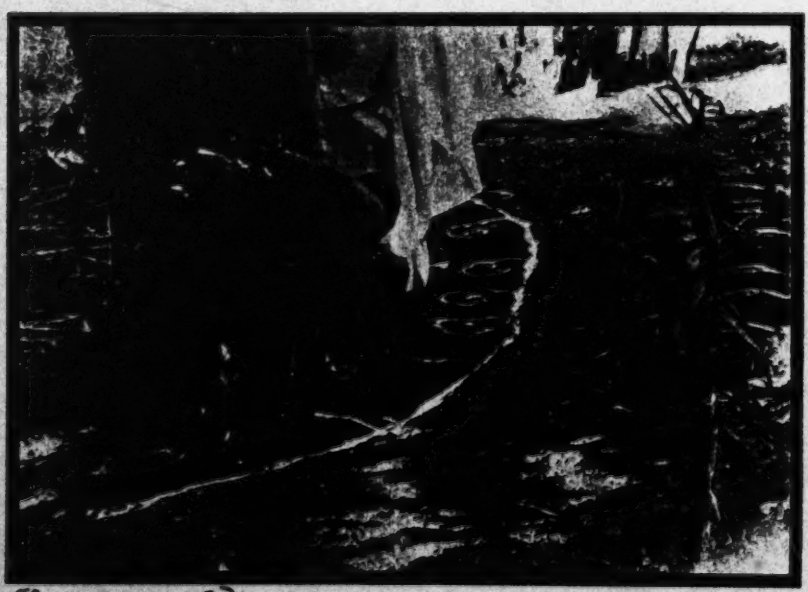

[facing P. 192]

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of whom are sincere practicing voduists as they are sincere practicing Catholics, who do not put an end to the worship of false gods.

The absence of graphic and plastic arts in Haitian culture, commented upon in a preceding chapter, must also be regarded as a case in point in laying bare the anatomy of this inner conflict of tradition, since it is important to recognize that the suppression of these forms of the prevalent African tradition would seem to have lost to the Haitian an important outlet for the resolution of inner tensions caused by pent-up drives. Even more revealing is the substitution of games of chance for those games of skill which in most African and New World Negro societies are played for their own sake alone—that is, for the prestige accruing to the skillful player. The strain that accompanies this play for stakes, often of no inconsiderable value in terms of the resources of the players, is patent to the most casual observer. The question here arises whether or not the craving for excitement of this kind may not in Haiti be traceable to the inhibition, under slavery, of some of the more gracious forms of African life which there make for social equilibrium. Might it not represent a kind of compensation for the thwarted psychic ease with which a culturally undisturbed people approach their own existence—a state of being which, in contrast, is quite lacking in Haiti?

A singularly illuminating comment upon these manifestations of instability in Haitian life has been made by Dr. J. C. Dorsainvil, who in drawing his conclusion called both upon his own medical training and on his experience of many years as a profound student of his own people. "It has perhaps been insufficiently remarked to what an astonishing degree the Haitian people live on their nerves." [1] As might be expected, he advances a number of possible explanations of the causes that underlie this state of "living on nerves." The wear and tear of life in the tropics is given as one reason; another is the excitement of the *vodun* dances with their frenzy of possession;

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When the dance drama ended, the hounsi carried the flags back into the hounfor. Then they sat on the ground while the houngan came forward to the center post to make his ritual flour drawing. Holding the flour in his hand, he allowed a little of it to trickle out in a fine white line. He worked rapidly, with half-closed eyes, speaking *langage*. A complicated white geometric pattern grew on the earth around the center post. Among its intricate designs highly stylized phallic forms were discernible. When the houngan had finished the drawing, he wrote the name of the loa whom they were serving: Ogoun Badagry. Then the other houngans and mambos came forward, one at a time, to add to the design. When the vèvè was completed it covered virtually the entire dance court.

The laplace came from the hounfor with a bundle of brilliantly colored beads. He stood by the houngan at the center post. One by one the hounsi came before the houngan, dropped on their knees, and kissed the ground. Around each hounsi's neck the houngan placed a string of beads. He raised her, pirouetted her first to the right, then to the left. The pirouette was to encourage possession by the loa.

From the hounfor the hounsi now brought herbs and vegetables for the sacrifice. Baskets and bottles were set out neatly on the ground, along with bundles of sticks and the iron pots, or *zins*.

The dance was resumed in a single rotating line around the houngan and the ritual offerings. Two hounsi in the center of the circle built fires, one on each side of the court. Over the fires they set the ritual iron pots. They poured oil into the pots and began the preparation of ritual food balls, like dumplings, from the ingredients at hand. One by one they dropped the dumplings into the oil, which was soon boiling.

The drumming, singing, and dancing were sustained at a high tension. A second team of drummers took over without a break in the music. The dancers now were almost exhausted. With a quick motion, the houngan spilled some rum into one of the boiling pots. A blue alcohol flame shot high into the air. Some of the hounsi screamed but continued to dance. Three of them fell to the ground, their limbs jerking uncontrollably. The loa had entered. Two of the "mounted" hounsi arose and continued to dance, staggering and jerking across the dance court. The third had to be lifted and carried into the hounfor.

The man who was to undergo initiation was waiting in the *djévo*, a special room in the hounfor. For the past seven days he had lain on a mat in the djévo, in virtual isolation except for visits from the houngan and the laplace.

Now the kanzo initiate was brought out, completely covered with a white cloth. Only his hands and feet could be seen. With one hand on the shoulder of the laplace, who preceded him, he moved with the dancers

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were set out in a row, and before them four *couis*, the half-gourd bowls used in services to the marassas, the twin spirits.

In the house, at the center of the floor, was a round flat stone about ten inches in diameter and about two inches thick, resembling a millstone. This was the *pierre-manman*, the mother stone responsible for the coming of the other loa stones and who cared for them in the absence of the family. In this stone, they said, was the spirit of the old loa Nananbouclou. On a mat in the corner of the room two children slept.

Outside, on a chair, his back against the wall of the house, the houngan sat, his rattle and bell in hand. He had come several miles to conduct the service. Most of those who danced were his own hounsi. The houngan was "strong" and well known in the region; people said he had worked for high government officials, including the president himself.

After several rounds of Arada dancing in which children as well as adults took part, the drums stopped. The houngan and his laplace moved up to the building which served for the night as the hounfor. It was up a steep slope, about a hundred feet from the dance court. There they prepared for the sacrifice to Chébo Profiel, the honored loa of the evening. Passing in and out among the spectators was a woman who would be possessed by Papa Chébo; since he was the guest of the service, she (or the loa in her head) was free to come and go as she chose, to speak as she pleased, and to do what she wished. Mostly she shook hands with people, a ceremony which continued throughout the night. First she would offer the right hand, then the left; or perhaps both at once, in which case the hands would be shaken downward vigorously three or four times. Someone ignorantly said, "Bon soir, Madame!" and she turned on him to reprimand his insolence. She was not "Madame," she was *l'Autorité*, the Authority.

During the course of the evening the conviction became stronger and stronger in her that she was Chébo Profiel. From the time we first saw her until the end of the evening her personality underwent marked changes. She "became" Papa Chébo.

The houngan sat before a small hole, possibly a foot deep and ten inches in diameter, in front of the hounfor. The fresh earth was piled neatly to the side, and an enameled plate was set on top of it. Around the hole were the various dishes to be offered to Chébo Profiel. The laplace prayed in Latin, a short Catholic service. Then the houngan, shaking his beaded rattle and tinkling his bell, called for Chébo to "enter." He made a small maize-flour drawing around the hole, and then began the feeding of the loa. The plates arranged for the feast contained roasted maize, roasted peanuts, bread, cassava, rice, and other foods. There were bottles of rum,

Oh, a day will come when they will remember me here, *kélé manyanl*
Oh, Damballa Wèdo *é, kélé manyan.*
Oh, Ayida Wèdo *é, kélé manyanl*
Oh, a day will come for you to remember me here, *kélé manyanl*

During the evening about twenty loa and ancestors came into the *caye* to talk. When the last had finished speaking the hills were already light, and the service was over.

Service por Èzilie Fréda and St. Jacques Majeur

This service took place not in the open but under a tonnelle surrounded by four walls, adjoining the hounfor of Alexis Stephan on the west fringes of Port-au-Prince. Separate from the hounfor and dance court was a shrine to the "dead" loa Gèdé Nimbo. The shrine was a small shed open on one side. Within, lighted by flickering oil lamps, was a life-size effigy of Gèdé, a scarecrow-like figure dressed in the loa's traditional attire—black tail coat and trousers, and a tall opera hat. On the otherwise blank face of the figure were smoked glasses with white rims.

The dancing was progressing under the supervision of the houngan's adjutant, the laplace. He wandered among the drummers and dancers, encouraged the singing, and issued orders here and there. No one seemed to take him very seriously. There was a good deal of joking, and the gathering seemed very much like an old-fashioned family reunion. There were perhaps a hundred dancers and spectators—friends, relatives, and devotees of Stephan's hounfor. Everyone was watching with affection an old woman who could not be restrained from dancing. She executed old classical steps and postures with a skill that called for running comment all around her. As each piece came to an end someone would step up to her and say something like: "Woy, Manman, mais ou passé mwél" (Oh, Mother, you are better than me!). Then they would attempt to get her to sit down again, but she would only shake them off and urge the drummers to get going if they were not too tired.

Eventually, the houngan, Stephan, made a casual entrance through the door of his adjoining hounfor. He held the usual ritual rattle and bell in his hand, and sauntered around to chat with his friends.

Gradually, almost imperceptibly, the dancing became more serious. Soon, only the hounsi, the female servitors, were dancing. The drums played a salute to Legba, the first loa to be called upon in a Vodoun service. For it is Legba who opens all gates and all highways, and who paves the way for communication with other deities. Though he is not the greatest of the loa, he is one of the most ancient. The houngan spilled water on the ground as a libation, and the dancing continued.

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

Then a well-dressed young man entered, and the drummers swiftly changed to the salute reserved for guests of distinction. The hounsi sang, "Président passe là, l'ap monté au gouvernment!" and waved paper flags and kerchiefs. The young man was a distant relative of Stephan's; he also was a houngan.

After a while Stephan brought from his hounfor a second asson, or ritual rattle, and another small hand bell, both of which he handed to the young man. He was extending the courtesy of his hounfor, sharing his instruments of authority and religious power with his fellow houngan. Then followed an exhibition between the two houngans that was half duel and half ballet. They stood face to face, each of them holding the asson in one hand and the tiny bell in the other. Stephan was "testing" the young houngan for the edification of all present. Each tiny move made by Stephan was duplicated simultaneously by his guest, as though he were a mirrored reflection.

Every posture Stephan made was duplicated instantly by his guest. The assons and the bells were agitated constantly. The rattle in the young man's hand did precisely what Stephan's did. The two men looked into each other's eyes with intensity, as though this bound their movements together and unified them. When Stephan twisted to the left, the other houngan twisted to the right. Every contortion of the young man was an exact replica of Stephan's movements. The two assons rattled out the same rhythms and the same signals; so did the bells. The backdrop for this "test" was provided by the drummers. The faces of the two men broke into a sweat from the intense nervous effort. At last it came to an end. A woman came forward and wiped their faces with a colored kerchief. The "testing" ceremony was over. The visiting houngan had been proved.

Stephan then made a ritual vèvè, or maize-flour ritual drawing on the ground. Afterward there was more singing and dancing by the hounsi. They sang several songs for Ézilie Fréda, the "pure" loa. And Alexis Stephan went into a trance. It was unexpected. The servitors had not prepared for it. In this emergency the visiting houngan took over. He seemed a little anxious. He was unfamiliar with the particular psychological factors at play in this particular hounfor. He was not certain of the character of Stephan's possession. But he took over grimly. The houngénicon, an older woman, stepped forward to help. While the young houngan wielded the asson and bell, the woman issued instructions. Stephan, his head hanging back, his eyes closed, was supported by two of the hounsi. Other servitors hurriedly brought out a white sheet and spread it on the ground. A chair and a table were set upon the sheet, and Stephan was placed in the chair, where he now sat with his head hanging limply on his chest.

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Ogoun Balindjo,
Oh Ogoun oh!
C'est pas mangé rangé
Pral tuyé chwal moin! [Ex. 44]

Ogoun Balindjo,
Oh, Ogoun, oh!
There is no poisoned food
That will kill my horse!

Ogoun Fai, known also by the Christian name St. Jacques, is the deity of war, and this song describes his courage and valor:

St. Jacques Majeur a voyé dit'm ga'çon déjà!
St. Jacques oh voyé dit'm ga'çon déjà!
St. Jacques Majeur a voyé dit'm ga'çon la-guè!
St. Jacques oh voyé dit'm ga'çon la-guè! [Ex. 45]

Major St. Jacques sent to tell me he is already a man!
St. Jacques, oh, sent to tell me he is already a man!
Major St. Jacques sent to tell me he is a man of war!
St. Jacques, oh, sent to tell me he is a man of war!

Should the service be to the loa Damballa Wèdo, symbolized as a rainbow and a great serpent, this song might be sung, commenting that he cannot be drowned in the water:

Papa Damballa ou c'est coulève oh!
Pouq'ou pas néyé?
Pouq'ou pas néyé?
Damballa pouq'ou pas néyé nan dleau? [Ex. 46]

Papa Damballa you are a snake, oh!
Why don't you drown?
Why don't you drown?
Damballa, why don't you drown in the water?

[778] [823] Damballa, the rainbow, is in fact the source of the water that bubbles from the earth in springs. He is a patron of the spring, and there he often lives in the form of a water snake. In many a hounfor where Damballa is specially revered there is a *bassin,* or pool, dedicated to him. [532] On the wall behind the pool there is usually a painting of Damballa and Ayida, depicted as great serpents, sometimes with a feathered headdress. The pool is kept filled with fresh water from the spring, and [231] here one or more small snakes—symbols of Damballa and Ayida—reside:

Ala loa marché nan dleau
C'est Damballa!
Ala loa marché nan dleau
C'est Damballa!
Papa Damballa c'est tête à dleau!
Papa Damballa c'est tête à dleau!

There is a loa who lives in the water,
It is Damballa!

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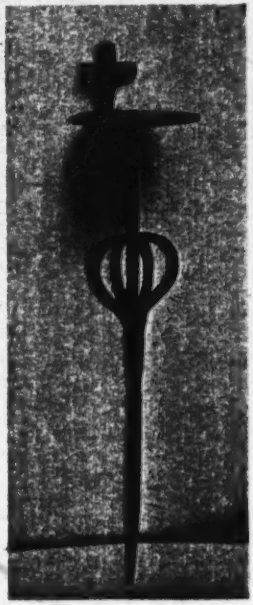
42. Forged iron "saber" of the loa Damballa, from a hounfor near Léogane. Height, 32 inches.



43. Forged iron standard for holding ritual objects, from a hounfor in the region of Léogane. Height, 18 inches.

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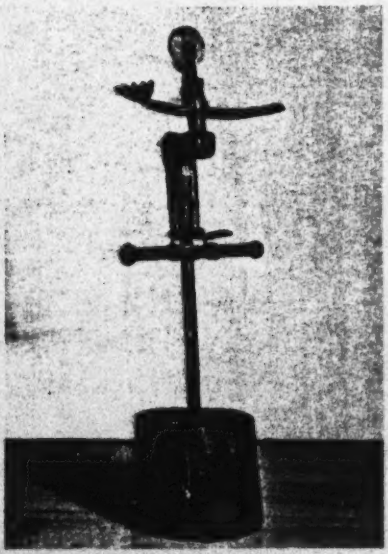

44. Ancient iron figure of the loa Quançon Fer, from a hounfor near Léogane. Height, 12 inches.

45. Old iron ritual bell, or ogan, from a hounfor in southern Haiti. Height, 11 inches.

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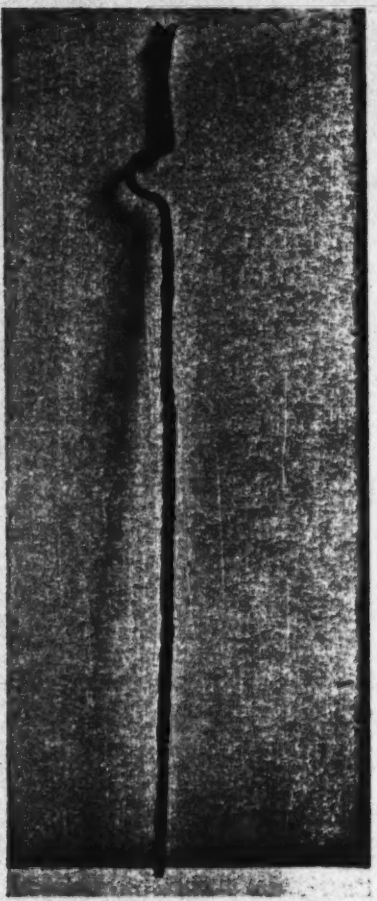

46. *Forged iron rod in the stylized form of a snake, representing the loa Damballa, from southern Haiti. Height, 34 inches.*

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47. *Iron sculpture on a Nago altar of a hounfor near Gonaïves, representing a bird sitting on a tree.*

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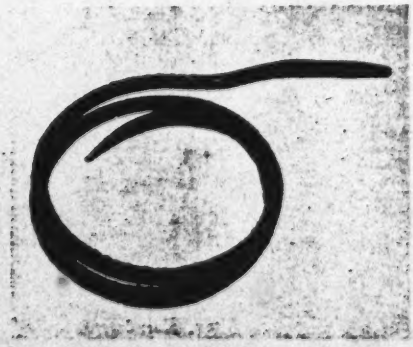
48. *A sculptured iron standard in a hounfor in the Cul-de-Sac Plain.*



49. *Forged snake, representing Damballa, from southern Haiti. Length in coiled form, 9 inches.*

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52 and 53. *Wall paintings representing loa, in a small hounfor on Morne l'Hôpital.*

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●532

54. Inside surface of a calabash bowl used in rituals of the hounfor, painted in black and white. The figure represents the graveyard loa, Baron Samedi, with a pick, shovel, and tombstone. Length, 15 inches.

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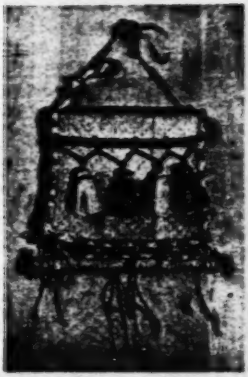
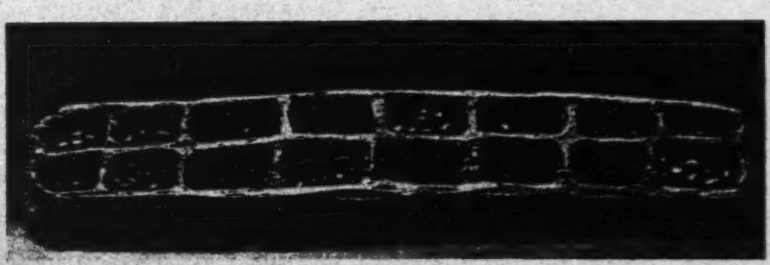


55. An alfor cousin, the traditional peasant knapsack.

524



56. Wari board cut from a mahogany log. Length, 29 inches.

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57. *Old wood carving of an unidentified deity, from a hounfor near Léogane. It is startlingly similar to the African carving shown in no. 58.*

58. *A wood carving from the Bambala tribe, western Belgian Congo. (Collection of Segy Gallery.)*

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59. *Carvings of more recent date, representing the loa of twins, from a hounfor in southern Haiti. Height, 12 and 14 inches.*

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[178]
[176]

60. *A carved cane head from the southwestern mountains.*

61. *Detail of a wood carving made about 1930 in the region of Port-au-Prince, representing the loa Loko. Work of this kind in mahogany has in the past thirty years deteriorated into neo-"African" carvings made for the tourist trade.*

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62. *A cayambouque. Cut from a single calabash, the two parts fit together tightly to form a single container. Some cayambouques are a foot or more tall. Height, 8 inches.*

63. *Terra-cotta figurines from the Cap Haitien region.*

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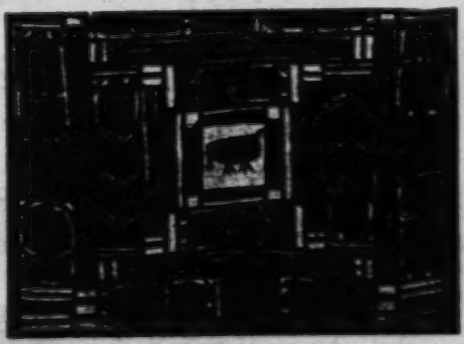

64. *Detail of a dye-painted burlap cloth. Animal and flower figures and geometric designs are used interchangeably.*

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●532

65 and 66. Modern "primitive" paintings by Beauvoir Byron. (Collection of Roger Coster.)

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[P.112-LL]

●532

67. *A contemporary "primitive" by M. Stephane.*

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68. *A painting by G. Abillard showing a Rara group led by a juggler holding a table in his teeth. (Collection of Marshall Stearns.)*

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3
[P 112-M]

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19. *Vodoun altar of the hounfor "Caille Agwé" in the Cul-de-Sac Plain. On the wall behind the altar are names of favored lwa. On the altar are jars containing lwa and souls of dead persons. Painted on its front wall, against which swords and flags are leaning, is the ship of Lwa Agwé.*

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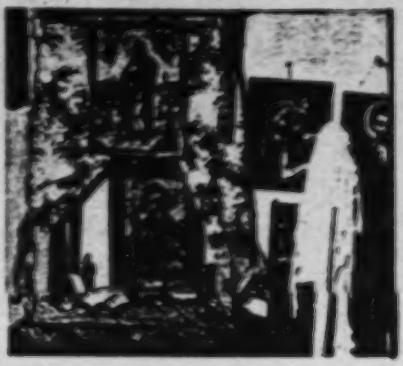

20. *A Vodoun altar in northern Haiti, scarcely distinguishable from a Catholic shrine. Houmfors range from the simple to the complex, from the poor to the rich, from the primitive to the sophisticated, and from the bizarre to the artistic.*

[914]
[916]

21. *Altar in the houmfor "Société de la Belle Jeune Fleur" in Port-au-Prince dedicated to the loa Pinga Mana. The cross surmounted by the skull represents the deity. Behind the table, leaning against the cross, is the pestle with which this loa "grinds" his enemies. On the other table are razor blades for Pinga Mana to eat.*

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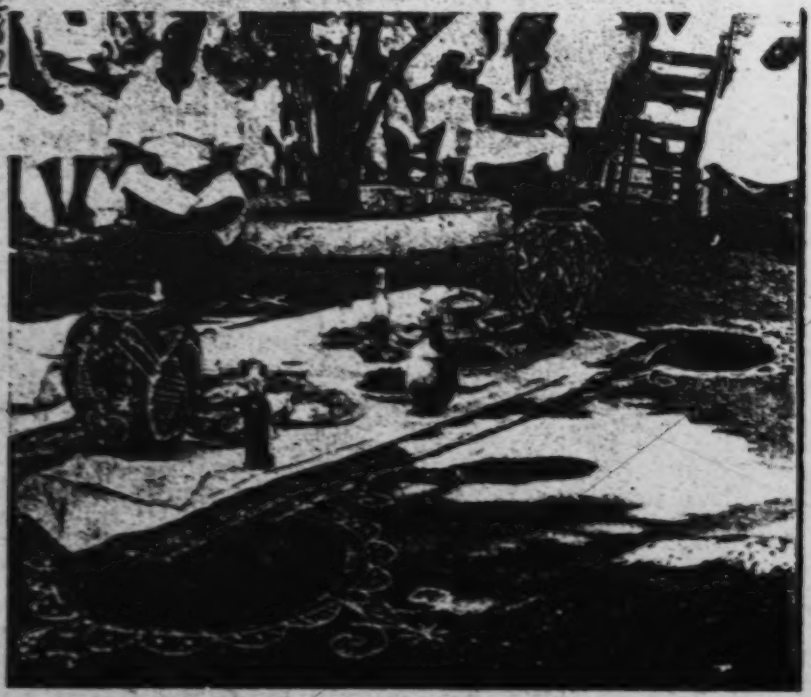
p. As the service in the Cul-de-Sac Plain. Laid out on the mat is a feast for the Ibo fon. The kpangan visually feeds the deities by placing food in the holes at each end of the mat. Designs on the pots are the symbolic patterns found generally in white. The mat in the background, surrounded by a low curbing, is sacred to the fon.



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792

32. *Maize-flour drawing, or vèvè, for the lоа Simbi.*

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778

33. *An ancient assotor drum, believed to have been made early in the nineteenth century. Seen faintly on the painted surface are a guinea hen and a palm tree.*

34. *An assotor drum in full regalia for a service in the Cul-de-Sac Plain.*

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10. The Arts– Flour, Wood, and Iron

It is the nonmaterial arts and traditions that have thrived best in Haiti through the years of slavery, political unrest, and poverty. Religious concepts, music, dancing, folk tales, proverbs, and games are found everywhere in profusion. Material arts of the past have fared less well. Today, nothing is left of the old African knowledge of wood carving, metal casting, appliqué work, and weaving. Why such major African arts have died out in Haiti is no mystery. They disappeared simply because there was no place for them under the slave system or in the new Haitian society which followed it.

Under the colonial masters, the demands made on the New World African were for coffee, cotton, and indigo. His creative talents were channeled into carpentry, masonry, and the building of facilities for production. There were no traditional artistic outlets or patrons for the wood carver, and no need for the weaver. Nor, during the years of slavery, was there much leisure for the craftsman to do his work even for the fun of it, should he be so inclined; indeed, this approach to wood carving or any other art would have been little understood or appreciated by most West Africans. A man who made an art object purely and simply to express a creative urge rather than to fill an express need would have been regarded as slightly eccentric. The old West African wood carvings with which we are now familiar were made because they were *required* for some purpose. A figure of a deity was needed in a shrine, a carved protective guard was needed for the household, a grave marker or a ceremonial mask was obligatory.

In Haiti the needs of those who ruled were different. The slave with knowledge of the forge was not put to work making spears, ceremonial axes, and the like; he was assigned the task of making grillwork for houses, hinges and bolts, iron tires for coach wheels, and metal parts for the sugar mills. The anonymous African ironworker did his job well.

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

used for wall hangings much as appliquéd cloths are used in Dahomey. Near Cap Haitien, in the north, ceramic workers make crude clay figurines of roosters, pigs, dogs, cows, and people. The "purpose" of these figurines is obscure, but it is likely that they are intended for use in Vodoun ritual, a number of them having been observed in hounfors in the vicinity of the town of Grande Rivière du Nord. In some mountain villages, canes carved with animal and human heads are commonly seen. Nor is the tradition of carving gourds and calabashes, popular in various regions of West Africa, altogether forgotten. The *cayambouque*, a divided calabash with the top ingeniously cut to fit into the lower part so as to form a sealed container, is sometimes covered with carved geometric designs, usually crude and haphazard but on occasion meticulous. Until recent years the common *cha-cha*, or gourd rattle, was similarly carved.

Most of the visible traditional art is to be found in the environs of the cult temple. The inner walls of many hounfors are covered with ritual designs and symbols and portraits of the deities. On the altar, sometimes, crude wood carvings of deities are seen, along with forged iron objects, carved marassa bowls, and grotesquely shaped drumsticks known as *baguettes guinée*. All the wooden objects are characterized by a plainness that relegates them to the category of purely functional and expendable things. The wood carving of a deity is not an image, it is a representation; it can be sold or otherwise disposed of, even thrown away if infested with beetles, and another object can be used to replace it. The only concern of the cult priest in this matter is that the deity concerned should understand the situation properly and not take offense. Thus there is no strong feeling that the wood carving should be a realistic representation or that it should be "beautiful." One relatively antique wood carving, completely West African in style, was found some years ago in a hounfor near Léogane and is now in the collection of the Musée du Peuple Haitien in Port-au-Prince (see fig. 57).

One of the most flourishing arts of the hounfor is the *vèvè*, or ritual drawing made on the earth in the course of a service. Most commonly these beautiful and ornate designs are made with white meal or flour, and in a few of the cults, primarily the Pétro, lampblack and red brick dust are also used. The vèvè is made by the houngan or the mambo. With sure, practiced movements, the cult priest allows the meal to trickle through his fingertips onto the ground where the rites are taking place, usually in the peristyle of the hounfor itself. The drawings he makes are composed of a multiplicity of cabalistic symbols—heart shapes, stars, interlocked V's, flags, abstract phallic forms, crosses, swords,

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

machetes, circles, mortar shapes, and so on—each with its own specific meaning. Sometimes the vèvè becomes openly pictorial, and there emerges a ship for the loa Agwé, snakes for Damballa and Ayida, a bull for the loa Taureau, a knapsack for the loa Azaka, or even a portrait of a deity, perhaps smoking a pipe or holding a sword.

The vèvè is not a permanent record. It is made as an act of supplication or veneration, and once it is finished it has no further value. In the ensuing ritual and dance, the vèvè is obliterated by the feet that pass across it. At the hands of one houngan, this invocational act results in a crude, even childlike, design. At the hands of another, it produces a drawing of beauty, integration, and highly developed form.

The drum-making craft, too, has offered an unbroken sequence of opportunity for satisfying artistic urges. The drum has a traditional form that cannot be tampered with; its shape is predetermined by its function, by the log from which it is hewn, and by existing standards. And yet, the drum maker has found it an object on which he can devise new decorative motifs, and he may even give it personal uniqueness. Some drums have styles that may be associated with specific regions of the country, others bear the stamp of the individual artist. Paint has been used on Haitian drums for a hundred years or more as a complement to carving. One assotor drum, dating from the earliest days of the Republic, and now preserved in a collection owned by the Bureau of Ethnology in Port-au-Prince, is decorated with a medallion showing the Haitian coat of arms, grenadiers, red and yellow snakes, and a sun with a face. This magnificent instrument, apparently the only one of its age and kind to have survived the years, is one of Haiti's art treasures.

The *couis*, or calabash bowl, of the hounfor rites is another object which is decorated with motifs. Abstract designs, ritual symbols, and sometimes human and animal figures are painted on the inner or concave surface of the bowl.

The rural traditional arts of Haiti have had a belated impact on the arts of the city. Within the past fifteen years there have appeared a number of painters, sculptors in wood and ceramics, and ironworkers who constitute an art movement sometimes referred to as the Haitian "renaissance." Many of these artists draw heavily on national lore and legend for inspiration and subject matter. Some of them are men who came only recently from villages or distant farms. Their work adorns many public buildings in Port-au-Prince and is eagerly sought by art collectors. Members of the elite class who once looked with embarrassment on the "primitive" countryside are finding increasing respect for the potentialities of their country cousins.